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A Passing Thought For Mr. Powers

Americans have been assured by Premier Khrushchev that their countryman, Francis G. Powers, will be tried by the Soviet Union as a foreign spy, which as good as means he will be convicted.

There is an outside possibility he might be exchanged for Russia's spy, Col. Rudolph Ivanovich Abel, now serving a 30-year sentence in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, but it is too far outside to be thought of seriously.

If Powers left Russia he would be able to tell what happened that caused him to be captured and his U2 plane to be picked up in recognizable pieces and it would not substantiate everything his captors have been saying.

It is of no importance to him now and never will be, but if he came home his true story would not substantiate the wild stories being told here, either.

THE UNITED STATES owes itself and its allies an apology for the way it reacted from the spy-plane incident.

If the Russian spy system is one-tenth as good as Americans suspect it is, its agents' reports to the Kremlin will make the head Reds wonder about the possibility of letting us grind ourselves into mincemeat with our own misgivings and hysteria.

There was, first of all, wide-eyed disbelief that the United States could be "guilty" of carrying on espionage. It never had occurred to millions of Americans that their government was as realistic about keeping itself informed as other governments are.

Then there was the breathless throat-cutting of partisans, who piled into the melee with sharpened knives pointed at President Eisenhower for permitting such a thing to happen. This was cooled down by the statesmanship

of a few Democrats of stature, but the damage had been done.

Congressional critics of CIA turned into the fray with their nostrils flaring to see how many scalps they might be able to skin off some formerly untouchable heads.

Disenchanted believers in the Blue Fairy doctrine of the way things are done in the world sobbed and said if this was the way it was they were turning their backs on the American way for good and would transfer their citizenship to Utopia.

AMERICANS who never make a practice of giving a fellow citizen the benefit of a doubt even teed off on Powers, himself, muttering that the guy must either have been stupid, a coward or worse for not remembering to blow himself, his airplane and his gear into Kingdom Come.

Every theorizer with access to the public ear and eye has been tempted to explain the incident against a background of ignorance and far too many theorizers yielded to temptation.

It has not been a reassuring experience. It has shown how poorly prepared the American people are to hold up their end in a cold war, which is first, last and always a contest to see how many traps the other fellow can be made to step into, just short of the one trap that might set off a hot war.

According to a House Committee on Un-American Activities Report, the FBI had referred 481 cases of espionage to the U.S. Department of Justice by 1956. Russian spies in this country have been a dime a dozen. But when it was learned in a roundabout and certainly an awkward way that Russia had nabbed a spy working for the United States, we lost our heads and started to jabber at one another.